

Dense development rejected

St. Charles shoots down 'new-urban' proposal for abandoned mall site

BY H. LEE MURPHY

St. Charles has blocked a developer's efforts to turn an abandoned shopping mall site into a show-place mixed-use project that would have been valued at close to \$500 million at completion.

Geneva-based Sho-Deen Inc. proposed a complex of 675 apartments and condominiums, a 175,000-square-foot shopping center, a 115-room, eight-story hotel, plus movie theaters, restaurants and health clubs on the 30-acre site of the old St. Charles Mall, which closed in 1996 and was demolished in 2003. The site, surrounded by houses and other retail property, has languished as the development firm trotted forth various concepts, including an auto mall, that failed to gain traction.

The city council rejected the proposed St. Charles Towne Center in an 8-to-2 vote after neighbors expressed concern that the development would exacerbate traffic congestion and school crowding.

Regional planning groups view the Sho-Deen concept as a prototype for similar suburbs. Smart development, they say, should pack more people closer to urban cores and quit grabbing prime farmland for subdivisions. West suburban St. Charles, with 33,600 people, has annexed raw land aggressively over the past three decades.

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[Randy Blankenhorn]

"There is a growing realization that we should not separate retail from residences but put them side by side in the same development and thus reduce auto travel."

For now, St. Charles has decided it's not ready for six- and seven-story apartment buildings. "People in our town have trouble getting their hands around a more vertical, new-urban style of development," says St. Charles Mayor Donald DeWitte, who did not vote on the Sho-Deen plan.

Other suburbs are embracing Sho-Deen's ideas. The company, which erected the 2,000-home Mill Creek subdivision in unincorporated Geneva Township in the mid-1990s, received city approval for

2,000 condos and a shopping center on a 30-acre site in downtown Aurora. The project is valued at more than \$700 million. In Elburn, Sho-Deen is moving ahead with plans to build 3,000 residences, a 500,000-square-foot mall and offices on a 680-acre site. And in DeKalb, Sho-Deen has three huge mixed-use projects in the works, with a total construction value approaching \$1 billion. One calls for clearing out seven acres of buildings downtown for 350 condos and 100,000 square feet of retail. Those projects are in various stages of approval.

"We think Sho-Deen's development ideas represent the wave of the future," says Mark Biernacki, city manager of DeKalb.

David Patzelt, president of family-owned Sho-Deen, says the company is working with lenders on financing and will self-fund much of the work, although he declines to give specifics. "Banks are very skittish right now," he says.

He says he's stymied by the rejection in St. Charles and notes that in Mount Prospect, developers are moving ahead on a redevelopment of the old Randhurst Mall. He isn't sure what his company will propose next for the St. Charles site.

"Most cities right now are searching desperately for jobs and sales tax revenues, and that's what we're trying to bring to St. Charles," he says. "This has been very frustrating for us."



**SHIA
KAPOS**

will return with her usual column next week.